

# **The Art of Instituting and Maintaining Learners' Motivation**

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## **Abstract**

Whereas teachers' responsibilities with accountability, class sizes and workload increase, their benefits, income and job security seem to decrease. Motivating and keeping classroom teachers motivated to successfully and happily perform their instructional duties can be challenging. One feasible approach to motivating teachers is offering them strategies to be big motivators. When students are motivated to learn, teachers can feel the joy of seeing their students succeed, which can be one way to inspire, enthuse, and energize teachers in their careers. The literature on motivation in language learning is extensive. It is, therefore, unrealistic to cover all major aspects of motivation in language learning. This paper focuses on aspects that are of interest to second language educators. Specifically, the author reviews the concept of motivation and discusses some strategies for instituting and nurturing second language students' motivation in light of the scholarly literature. The paper ends with eight recommended strategies that could be utilized in various instructional contexts. (This paper contains two tables.)

## Motivation

Motivation has traditionally been divided into integrative and instrumental or intrinsic and extrinsic. The relationship between these two dichotomies, as Bailey (1986, cited in Brown, 2007, p. 175) provided, can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of motivation (Bailey, 1986, cited in Brown, 2007, p. 175)

	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Integrative	L2 learner wishes to integrate with the L2 culture (e.g., for immigration or marriage)	Someone else wishes the L2 learner to know the L2 for integrative reasons (e.g., Japanese parents send kids to Japanese language school)
Instrumental	L2 learner wishes to achieve goals utilizing L2 (e.g., for a career)	External power wants L2 learner to learn L2 (e.g., corporation sends Japanese businessman to U.S. for language training)

How to motivate students to learn and maintain their motivation during their studies and how to best inspire and enthuse students with learning may be questions which classroom teachers constantly ask themselves before, during, and after classes. Dörnyei (2007) stated that the motivating factors of learning contexts can be bolstered by the language teacher. Additionally, Lamb (2007) suggested that teachers should motivate learners to survive the rocky passage of school.

Motivation in second language acquisition has been rigorously discussed by a plethora of authors such as Gardner and Lambert (1972), Williams and Burden (1997), Dörnyei (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2001a, 2005), Dörnyei and Otto (1998), Dörnyei and Skehan (2003), Dörnyei and Schmidt (2001), Spolsky (2000), and Ushioda and Dörnyei (2012), to name but a few. Although

motivation has been considered an elusive concept that evades “any simple explanation or prescription” (Wlodkowski, 2011, p. 14), attempts have been made to define it. Covington (1998, p. 1) stated that “motivation, like the concept of gravity, is easier to describe (in terms of its outward, observable effects) than it is to define. Of course, this has not stopped people from trying it.” Dörnyei (2001, p. 1), in fact, started his book by claiming that “there is no such thing as ‘motivation’.” As the author further explained, what he actually meant by that is that motivation is a vague, abstract term that is commonly used to refer to a wide variety of meanings. According to Dörnyei, motivation involves both direction (the choice to do something) and intensity (the amount of effort and persistence with it). Therefore, as this scholar added, motivation can provide the reasons people elect to do something, how hard they will pursue it, and how long they will sustain such an activity. Motivation is also defined as “a desire to learn plus a willingness to expend effort in doing so” (McGroarty, 1996, p. 30). In terms of the motivation to learn a language, Cooper and Seckbach (1977) argued that when knowing a language is associated with material benefits, and when people have the opportunity to study it, they are likely to do so. Intuitively, if being able to use a language is an advantage for a person socially, professionally, or economically, he or she will be motivated to learn the language.

Motivation is seen from different perspectives. From a behaviorist perspective, motivation is viewed as the product of external forces through reinforcement. A cognitive perspective sees motivation as a choice human beings make within their control. In a constructivist perspective, motivation is based upon the premise that each person is motivated in a different way (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Motivation, therefore, can be both internal drive and external forces which could be influenced from a variety of sources. Due to its complicated, abstract, and multifaceted nature, a

definition of motivation is elusive and strategies for enhancing motivation are notoriously difficult to document, as they vary depending on individuals and contexts. Dörnyei (2001b) postulated that from a classroom teacher's point of view the most pressing question about motivation is not what motivation is but how motivation can be increased.

### **Strategies for Instituting and Nurturing Sustained Motivation**

This section reviews four sets of motivational strategies available in the scholarly literature and ends with eight recommended strategies that could be employed in a wide variety of instructional contexts.

In 1997, Williams and Burden provided the following practical motivational suggestions to classroom teachers:

- It is necessary for teachers to recognize the complexity of motivation. As motivation involves various interrelated factors, it would be unwise to take a simplistic view on motivation. If one approach to motivating learners does not work, another may be effective. It should also be born in mind that motivation is far more complex than interesting and fun learning.
- Teachers have to be cognizant of initiating and sustaining motivation. What initiates and what sustains motivation has not been clearly stated in the literature.
- They need to discuss with learners the reason for carrying out classroom activities.
- Teachers should involve learners in making decisions related to learning the target language such as learning activities, the methods of teaching and learning, and the needed effort for learning.

- It would be wise for teachers to involve learners in setting learning goals, as learners will be able to develop feelings of control and autonomy in learning.
- Teachers should recognize people as individuals by allowing them to learn in ways that are personal and significant to them.
- Teachers need to help learners build up individuals' beliefs in themselves.
- Teachers should help students develop internal beliefs which are the feelings that one is the cause of one's own actions and that one is in control of the results of one's actions.
- Teachers need to help learners move toward a mastery oriented style because those who are mastery oriented are often in control of their actions and manage to find ways to enhance their performance and to succeed in an activity.
- It is necessary to help learners enhance intrinsic motivation.
- It is of great importance for teachers to create a supportive learning environment.
- Teachers' feedback should be informational so that learners can realize their strengths, weaknesses, and what they need to do to improve. Teachers also need to be aware of the dangers of over-reliance on praise and the negative effects of punishments and reprimands.

One year later, Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) proffered language teachers ten commandments for motivating learners:

- Set a personal example with your own behavior.
- Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
- Present the task properly.
- Develop a good relationship with the learners.

- Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence.
- Make language classes interesting.
- Promote learner autonomy.
- Personalize the learning process.
- Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
- Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

Svinicki (1999, pp. 22-23) reviewed different motivation theories and provided eight instructional strategies deriving from those theories:

- Offer reinforcement for activities that teachers wish to encourage.
- Focus on internal reinforcers and motivation (giving students choices regarding how learning should take place).
- Set challenging but achievable goals for learning and provide feedback on progress.
- Change learners' beliefs and attitudes about learning.
- Encourage mastery of goal orientation (minimize student-to-student comparisons).
- Enhance the perceived value of the learning task.
- Convince learners that they can succeed; increase their self-efficacy.
- Give learners choices about goals and strategies for achieving them.

Whereas Williams and Burden (1997) suggested a three-stage model of motivation that includes reasons for doing something, deciding to do something, and sustaining the effort, Dörnyei (2001) proposed a model composed of four major components of motivational teaching practice in the second language classroom. Based upon the scholarly literature on motivation, Dörnyei (2001) presented a framework grounded in research comprising 35 motivational strategies to aid second

language classroom teachers in motivating their learners. The strategies are classified into four groups: (a) creating basic motivational conditions, (b) generating initial motivation, (c) maintaining and protecting motivation, and (d) encouraging positive self-evaluation. The strategies are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Motivational strategies (Dörnyei, 2001)

Creating the basic motivational conditions	
1.	Teachers need to demonstrate and talk about their own enthusiasm for the course material and how it affects them personally.
2.	They need to take the students' learning very seriously.
3.	They need to develop a personal relationship with their students.
4.	They need to develop a collaborative relationship with the students' parents.
5.	They need to create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere in the classroom.
6.	They need to promote the development of group cohesiveness.
7.	They need to formulate group norms explicitly, and have them discussed and accepted by learners.
8.	They need to have group norms consistently observed.
Generating initial motivation	
9.	Teachers can promote the students' language-related values by presenting peer role models.
10.	They can raise the students' intrinsic interest in the process of second language learning.
11.	They can promote 'integrative' value by encouraging a positive and open-minded disposition toward the second language, its speakers, and toward foreignness in general.
12.	They can promote the students' awareness of the instrumental values associated with the knowledge of a second language.
13.	They can increase the students' expectancy of success in particular tasks and in learning in general.
14.	They can increase the students' goal-orientedness by formulating explicit class goals accepted by them.
15.	They can make the curriculum and the teaching materials relevant to the students.
16.	They can help to create realistic learner beliefs.
Maintaining and protecting motivation	
17.	Teachers should make learning more stimulating and enjoyable by breaking the monotony of classroom events.
18.	They should make learning stimulating and enjoyable for the students by increasing the attractiveness of the tasks.
19.	They should make learning stimulating and enjoyable for the students by enlisting them as active task participants.
20.	They should present and administer tasks in a motivating way.
21.	They should use goal-setting methods in their classroom.

22. They should use contracting methods with their students to formalize their goal commitment.
23. They should provide the students with regular experiences of success.
24. They should build their students' confidence by offering regular encouragement.
25. They should help diminish language anxiety by removing or reducing the anxiety-provoking elements in the learning environment.
26. They should build their students' confidence in their learning abilities by teaching them various learner strategies.
27. They should allow the students to maintain a positive social image while engaged in the learning tasks.
28. They should increase student motivation by promoting cooperation among the students.
29. They should increase student motivation by actively promoting learner autonomy.
30. They should increase the students' self-motivating capacity.
Encouraging positive self-evaluation
31. Teachers ought to promote effort attributions in their students.
32. They ought to provide students with positive information feedback.
33. They ought to increase student satisfaction.
34. They ought to offer rewards in a motivational manner.
35. They ought to use grades in a motivating manner, reducing as much as possible their demotivating impact.

For each of the strategies, Dörnyei (2001) offered specific instructions for classroom teachers. For example, to take students' learning seriously (strategy 2), teachers can show students that they care about students' progress, indicate teachers' mental and physical availability for all academically related activities, and have high expectations for what students can attain. Nevertheless, Dörnyei (2001) emphasized that the long list of strategies should be selectively used to suit both the teacher and the learner and that what really counts is quality, not quantity. The researcher admitted that he only utilized a fraction of the strategies he supplied. Depending on teaching contexts, cultural norms, and student populations, each teacher may find some strategies more useful and relevant than others. The set of strategies and their accompanying specific instructions offered by Dörnyei are an essential resource for language teachers who desire to motivate their language learners.



As learners are of various types and learning contexts are indefinite, no set of strategies may work for all learners and teaching contexts. Just as there are many viable ways to effectively teach students, there are also as many methods to bolster students' motivation. The strategies that follow may be selectively utilized with many different student populations.

### **Setting Clear and Attainable Objectives**

Tarone and Swierzbins (2009, p. 3) noted that "language learning motivation is the intensity and persistence of a learner's desire to succeed." It is, however, hard to determine when a learner has achieved success in learning a language. Therefore, it is quite difficult for learners to know if they do well enough in learning a language to maintain and foster their motivation. Learners may keep wondering where they are in their endeavor to learn English and their uncertainty can be a hindrance or a source of amotivation. In order to encourage learners to constantly maintain a high level of motivation in learning a new language, teachers need to develop clear and achievable objectives for each class meeting, lesson, and semester. If students feel that they have made measurable progress in learning, they may be motivated enough to continue to work hard to reach a higher level of accomplishment as set out by a language program or teachers. Setting specific and achievable goals is one doable step to sustaining as well as fostering language learners' motivation. As found by Svinicki (1999), one of the motivational strategies is setting "challenging but achievable goals." In addition, clear course objectives have been found to have a strong influence on students' motivation to study out of class (Fukuda & Yoshida, 2013). It is often difficult to know what to focus on when students learn on their own outside of class, so clear course objectives can serve a guide to help them achieve the goals of the course.

## **Practicing Clear Speaking and Supportive Conversation**

Another approach to motivating language learners is by speaking and explaining language points clearly to ensure that learners can understand what has been communicated to them. The more learners can understand what is taught in the classroom the better they feel about their learning progress. This is especially true for adult learners learning a language in a context in which the target language is not spoken. Due to a lack of listening input, their listening skills are often weak. Not being able to understand much of what is said by the teacher is another possible cause of amotivation. When learners have to complete a task that they are interested in and understand clearly how to complete, they are likely to perform it well. As a result, their overall motivation may be enhanced. A single activity or a series of well-designed activities that can bolster learners' desire to learn and sustain that desire can have an enduring effect on their motivation to master the language in the long run. Additionally, having supportive conversations with learners, talking to them at the rate and level that they can understand, is also a way to motivate them, as they feel that their ability to communicate in the target language is effective enough to convey a certain amount of information. In a diary study describing her own informal self-study of Japanese while teaching in Japan, Casanave (2012) noted that she was so discouraged when she failed to understand conversations in Japanese with her tutor that she quit lessons with the tutor. However, she regained her pleasure and motivation to learn the language when she talked about the topics she was interested in and familiar with to two Japanese students who spoke at the level she could easily understand.

## **Providing Detailed and Constructive Feedback**

The crucial role of feedback has been reiterated in suggestions provided by Williams and Burden (1997), Svinicki (1999), and Dörnyei (2001). Moreover, feedback given to learners can also be one method of helping students to maintain or even increase their motivation. If feedback is clear and constructive enough, learners may feel that they are able to meet their teachers' expectations. On the other hand, when feedback is not specific enough or is destructive, learners' motivation may decrease drastically. The following example can better illustrate the importance of feedback. There was a doctoral student who was highly motivated to learn and conduct research in her area of studies. In one of her doctoral courses, she had to carry out an empirical study to investigate one topic of her choice in second language acquisition. She presented her professor with a research proposal and received the professor's feedback that suggested she do more than her initial intention for the proposed study. She was nervous as she did not possess the skills needed to investigate the suggested section added by the professor. Nonetheless, because the professor's feedback was accompanied with detailed and structured instructions on how to go about investigating her suggestions, the student was confident enough to do as was suggested, and she finally completed the research with success beyond her imagination feeling much more motivated to continue her arduous process of completing her doctorate. The same highly motivated student took another course with a professor who required her to complete a synthesis of research in one specific area of using technology in language teaching. She submitted her work to the professor and received feedback that was so destructive that she considered dropping out of her doctoral program. She had been in the doctoral program for more than one year, had completed all her courses with the highest caliber, and had been regarded as one of the brightest students in the program. However, one professor's feedback was so powerful that she was in

great stress and reconsidered pursuing her goal of obtaining a doctoral degree. Feedback, therefore, can be a motivating factor that encourages lifelong learning or love for learning a certain subject, but it can also be a reason that essentially influences one's decision whether to follow a certain career path or to drastically change it. In fact, Dörnyei (2009) suggested that three main sources of motivation in language learning are: (a) the learner seeing him or herself as an effective language learner, (b) the pressure emanating from the learner's environment, and (c) positive learning experiences. The last of the three is certainly within the ability of considerate, conscientious, and dedicated classroom educators.

### **Making Good First Impressions**

Furthermore, in daily life, first impressions are often a key factor that influences the way people think of others. In educational contexts, it was also found that college students who had a positive experience during their first day of class performed better during the semester and reported to be more motivated during the class than the students who had experienced a negative first day of class (Wilson & Wilson, 2007). The implications for language teachers may probably be that if language teachers can provide a motivating and positive learning experience on the first day of class, chances are their students may have more motivation to be fully engaged and active in attaining the learning goals of the course throughout the semester. Just as it is said in Vietnamese, if something starts smoothly, it will proceed smoothly; if the first day of class is a positive experience for students, such experience will endure and act as a motivating factor for them to complete the course with possible utmost ease and success. Additionally, it was also found that in college courses in which college instructors began their course with a reciprocal interview activity aimed at establishing expectations and a supportive environment the students reported "greater clarity regarding their course responsibilities, more support from their

instructor, and greater course satisfaction on both official evaluations and experimenter-administered measures” (Hermann, Foster, & Hardin, 2010, p. 79). Apparently, if students know what is expected of them, they feel assured that they will be able to satisfactorily fulfill their responsibilities. Thus, the task for the teacher is to ensure that their students know exactly what they need to do as unambiguously as possible.

### **Having High Expectations of Students**

Teachers’ expectations can also be one factor that makes students achieve more than they typically can. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) have found that those students who are thought of as smart by their teachers perform significantly better than they usually do. If language students are seen as able individuals with varying needs and learning approaches and if they are given the support they need, they will be successful language learners. The key is the suitable scaffolding support that teachers provide students during their course of studies. Each student requires a different type of instruction that works best for them, but the teacher is unable to teach students individually in the class. The fine line for classroom teachers is to provide instruction at a level that is challenging enough for weak students to understand but at the same time not too easy so as to keep abler students interested in the lesson. As students in the same class level may have uneven language proficiency, which is common in most language classrooms, teachers’ expectations for each student have to be different to be realistic. The main point is each student is expected and assisted to perform beyond their current level of language proficiency. To that end, classroom teachers need to be cognizant of principles and strategies for teaching students with varying proficiency levels in the same class.

## **Incorporating Technology in Language Learning Activities**

In a recent study, Freiermuth and Huang (2012) ascertained that online chatting is a motivating factor for students to communicate in the target language. Indeed, technology can be an extremely important factor to motivate students to learn the target language, if used effectively and appropriately. For example, if students are shown how to use Photo Story to create a short story about themselves, their families, or someone they like, they can be empowered by the ability to communicate a short message by simply reading the scripts to accompany a short video clip or a series of photos with the teacher's assistance and guidance. In this case, students will be motivated to learn the target language for both communication and technology use. They can then feel that the use of what they are learning is practical and tangible, which may give them more instrumental motivation to learn the language.

## **Making Students Feel Comfortable**

Krashen (1987) put forward a set of five hypotheses about second language acquisition, one of which is the Affective Filter hypothesis, which "implies that our pedagogical goals should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating a situation that encourages a low filter" (p. 32). He stated that:

Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter - even if they understand the message, the input will not reach that part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device. Those with attitudes more conducive to second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input, they

will also have a lower or weaker filter. They will be more open to the input, and it will strike “deeper” (Stevick, 1976). (p. 31)

Moreover, Krashen (op. cit.) added that effective language teachers are those “who can provide input and make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation” (32). It may be understood that comfort plays an important role in language learning especially in instructed contexts. Comfort is considered a key factor in second language learning because when learners are worried, nervous, or feel insecure, they may not learn much. However, when they are comfortable, they may learn much more. Instead of forcing learners to work in pairs or groups, teachers may need to consider allowing students to work in whatever ways they are comfortable as long as the learning objectives are achieved. For instance, if the goal is to ask learners to identify the supporting details of a main idea of a reading passage, students should be given a choice whether to discuss with their friends or to work on their own. Nonetheless, when the goal is to have students engage in a conversation with other students to improve their speaking or discussion skills, students should certainly not be allowed to work alone, but they should be given a choice to work with the students they like or feel comfortable with. Fukuda and Yoshida (2013) ascertained that one of the factors motivating students to learn out of class time is creating non-threatening classroom environments. Thus, classroom teachers may need to make students feel secure, confident, and comfortable in the classroom to ensure that optimal learning takes place.

### **Creating Positive Student-Teacher Rapport**

Finally, good student-teacher rapport has also been reported as reason for students to attend class, show greater attentiveness in class, study, contact their teacher and engage in academic behaviors (Buskist & Saville, 2004; Benson, Cohen, & Buskist, 2005). Dörnyei

(2001), in effect, pointed out that teachers should develop a personal relationship with their students. In order to create favorable learning conditions, good rapport seems to be an essential component in the search for ways to motivate students. Although rapport must be built by both teachers and students, teachers are likely to be in a position to set the tone and atmosphere of the class. If they can manage to create good rapport with their students, the teaching and learning endeavor may be more favorably perceived by both parties. Teachers interested in measuring teacher-student rapport may find the scale developed by Wilson, Ryan, and Pugh (2010) a useful measure. Moreover, Fukuda and Yoshida (2013) found that strong student-teacher relationship was one of the factors that make students study out of class. The participants in their study reported that “the teacher remembering every student’s face and name helped them foster a strong student-teacher relationship, which in turn, enhanced their attitude towards out of class study time” (p. 38).

Armed with knowledge of empirical research findings, their implications, and strategies for motivating language learners, classroom teachers can decide for themselves what strategies to use with their students for successful ultimate learning outcomes.



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